Jan 1955

Aeneid continue

Munstered gurê

23 Apl 46

Dux vitae

mortuus

already typed (4 copies)

(1955) Viae ref.

a. d. III Id. Ian.

CONTICVERE·
OMNES·INTENTI
QVE·ORA·TENEBANT·

Dearest René, that was a close shave — I refer to the bant in tenebant; it would have made old Coles hopping mad. I was overjoyed to hear from you. I've been greatly wondering how you were. I had this evening marked down in red pencil in the Radio Times so that I should hear you, which I hope to do. It's now the afternoon only. Thanks most awfully for sending the script. I've read some of it & like it very much; especially in certain places. It has that steady, sure, unhesitant feeling that seems to be in the original. I shall be intrigued to hear this evening what these B.B.C. actors do to it. I shall be very interested to hear what happens. Anyway I'm awfully glad you've done it from every possible point of view and I hope you do some more. It is strange, in one way, that it should be the Æneid that you are doing because I remember you used not to be too hot on it as a work. But I never think of the Æneid without thinking of our freezing of the water at Capel and your telling me about the Ennius version & Vergil's version of the Fabius Cunctator referance. It, that incident, played quite a big part I think in various things to do with ~~my~~ the sort of stuff I've thought about & used in my work, such as it's been. In fact of course all that coming together of chaps at Capel was a very formative epoch for us blokes one way & another. With regard to yr enquiries about my health & all that I suppose I'm not so bad. That thing I had

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* it's similar to the sentence which Eric used to like quoting with much chuckling.

to go to the hospital to be Xrayed for (a good bit of English!*) turned out to be negative. They thought it might be something to do with our old friend the prostate gland, but, up to date, they can't see in the photographs anything wrong, so I suppose ~~[illegible]~~ it was something other — some infection of sorts in the bladder ~~[illegible]~~ — anyway I was relieved that it was not ~~[illegible]~~ needful to have the surgeon's art practised round about that interior ~~[illegible]~~ area (or part) as, well, after all: 'There was a young lady who went to her bed et cetera'. Lord, I would like to see you. But it seems that as ~~[illegible]~~ age increases we all live by some series of accidents, more apart. I feel it very much. A kind of isolation of the middle-aged & over from those with whom they have most in common. I've heard, often, people speaking of it — I can't recall quite who — but I think perhaps it was the Tiger & also I think maybe, Desmond — anyway it does seem to be a thing that happens, anyway to some types of bloke. I've not seen dear Harman for ages — what with one thing and another. Yes, sorry about the party at Tom's. But poor old Tom it was then who was ill. Harman told me over the telephone that Mick Richey had blown in one day just back from a rapid visit to Capri with Graham Greene. They are astounding chaps for nipping about. It must be jolly nice to have that kind of mobility ~~[illegible]~~ — it is after all not only an affair of ~~[illegible]~~ being physically well & active but also having a kind of mobility of spirit — I do envy them.

Thursday Jan. 12th. Well, I listened to Marius Goring & Coy. declaiming your trans. They didn't murder it as much as I expected. In fact I thought Marius Goring was good & not too much rhetoric of style

What did you think? Did it correspond with your intentions at all? You were clever to ~~p~~ get 'em to keep that music at the minimum.(*) I thought (I speak subjectively only & just of my feelings as I listened) that the passages about 3/4 through ~~would~~ were best — but it's hard to sort out the terrible impressiveness of the actual content from the form. I can say only that I was most moved by ~~that~~ account of the hopeless rallying — your rendering of all that part from round about line 325 to ~~[illegible]~~ somewhere about 450 of the original I think — (incidentally very like a really nasty jamb in trench warfare). But the whole story is so moving that, as I say, it is not too easy to assess the art. But I have, by now, read various attempts of various blokes to translate this stuff, and none of them seem to me to get the feeling as you do. But I become more & more bewildered by the problems ~~of [illegible]~~ that must arise in any translation of almost anything. For even a bloke like me who knows no languages can feel the frustration of conveying even the simplest word of one language ~~[illegible]~~ in another. I'm beginning to marvel that it works at all. But it clearly can be done as you showed in Roland & I think, now, in this bit, or parts of this bit, of the Æneid. Lord I wish I wasn't such a bloody dolt & nitwit with regard to learning these languages. I've tried to get hold of some ~~e~~ elementary understanding of Latin & Welsh but I never

* I thought we should have a fair dose of trumpets & the crackle of flames so that Hague's trans. would be lost in noises off — and on! But no. Seemed well.

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make any progress really. I know a longer list of substantives than I did ten years ago, I suppose, but the ruddy grammar I cannot master. Also, I find, that if I learn a thing now, I've forgotten it in a week.* I do wish to God I'd been taught this stuff when I was young instead of arsing around in that bloody art school.

I had a pretty good session of trying to master a bit more of Jimmy Joyce a little bit back. You know, Finnegan's Wake is a truly astounding work. — the more one tries & tries to drag from it some of its meanings the more that greater becomes apparent. I find. But lord! it is tough going. but when a passage becomes illumined it is more than worth it & mostly a glorious jokko too. My impression is that there is, however, no part as beautiful as the Anna Livia section & of that section, the bit he recorded on the gramophone is the best. To that extent I've been disappointed, in that I have not come upon an equally beautiful bit. Someone gave me a book called A Skeleton Key to Finnegans Wake written by two Americans, Joseph Campbell & Henry Morton Robinson, published by Faber in 1947. I was given this book only recently and I find it a really first rate piece of work. It is without pretensions — just two chaps settled down over a period of years to study the text of The Wake & see if they could elucidate its general pattern. The result of their work, is, in my view, most

* I learnt the conjugation of the Welsh verb 'to be', bod and more or less felt I knew and it worked as now I've forgotten it nearly all.

enormously helpful. It is a work of true exegesis and I think The Wake deserves every bit of analysis & elucidation that can be brought to it. Well, forgive this lecture on Joyce – I had no intention to crack on in this way.

There are many, many things I want to talk to you about, but when it comes to writing 'em down it becomes impossibly complicated. I dont suppose you heard a talk I gave called The Viae, on the 3rd in November – it was more or less about the Roman roads of Britain. I'd rather like you to hear it. I think it is to be repeated fairly soon – they said early in the new year.

No creative work done for a long time really – only bits & pieces. I had a bit of a so-called 'poem' in that American magazine Poetry published in Chicago*. It is called 'The Wall' and is really part of some of that stuff I was doing in the war about the soldiers on the wall of Jerusalem. I hope later to read it on the B.B.C. (it is v. short – ten minutes to read) But this last piece of information is strictly between you & me, at present.

I went one day in November to get my CBE from the Queen. It was in some

* It is run by a chap called ~~Harry~~ Henry Rago. ~~[illegible]~~ Tom Eliot & Ezra P. both had their earliest poems published in it years & years ago. It's a funny little magazine though. Very small & very bad typography.

ways a strange experience. I felt peculiarly unreal. What odd things happen to one ~~[illegible]~~ as the years go by. I liked the thing in yr letter abt the cow hunt in the snowy wood that at least is something still real. And it rang many bells — what's that Irish thing called? — ~~abt~~ the cattle — — I The Táin Bó Cualnge* The Cattle-raid of Cooley. Did I ever tell you abt the Irish girl I saw in Oct. or ~~Sept~~ November 1918 in the hills above Limerick? It was a red sundown and I was coming with some other Fusiliers along a wet hill-road by a white-washed cabin & we met a girl in a torn white shift of sorts with a red skirt with a plum-coloured velvet wide hem to the skirt ~~which reached~~ a bit below the knee and she had auburn hair floating free over her shoulders & in the ~~[illegible]~~ wind and her legs & feet & arms were bare ~~and~~ she had a long stick ~~&~~ she was driving a red coloured cow before her and the evening sun bathed all these differing reds & bronzes — it was a thing I shall not forget. She walked with great dignity & was very beautiful in the face* & white skinned ~~and in the~~ squalor & deep muck by the white ~~[illegible]~~ cabin she passed us and it was like the Bronze Age ~~must~~ have been — a bit. I think often of her & wonder who she was. We were marching in battle-order if I remember rightly — abt two sections of platoon of us, or perhaps less, coming back from some manoeuvers in the hills — but it is the varied reds that I remember most

* have you any idea how these words are pronounced? Irish orthography is much more difficult than Welsh, because one leaves out half the letters in making the sounds!

*Or it may be one attributed beauty to her afterwards, for I cannot in the least recall what she looked like facially.

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But maybe ~~[illegible]~~ I've told you all this before, but I cant recall doing so. For some reason that is another image I associate with Troy — the red sunset on some red cattle-girl in the hills of Munster — I suppose for fairly obvious reasons — cattle-raiders, horse-raiders, soldiers, queens, queans and the red as of flame. & the great dignity, well, FVIT ILIVM ... I dont suppose you'd find a figure like that in Munster now, do you? She'd be probably crouched over the television! What a lovely picture that is of Rosalind's! I enclose a poor exchange if you would pass it on to her.*

* NO, I shant have it ready ~~[illegible]~~ & I want to post this to you as I'll post Rosalind's ~~[illegible]~~ over weekend. It was a nice picture to get.

I was very saddened & angry ~~[illegible]~~ when in looking through last weeks great History supplement to the Times ~~[illegible]~~ Lit. Sup that no mention was made at all of Tiger Dawson. I feel inclined to write to Alan Pryce-Jones about this. It is an outrage. You probably saw it. There were articles by all the chaps, Toynbee, Barraclough; Butterfield, Stenton, ~~[illegible]~~ that Rowse & others were all mentioned in same context — but not the Tiger. After all the Tiger, on any count, is at least one of the most important names in English historico-cultural studies ~~[illegible]~~ during the last 20 years. I dont understand it, unless its deliberate or unconscious neglect of, well, the Tigers' ~~[illegible]~~ opinions & what he stands for. I must cease

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the shapeless rigmarole. There's so many things to talk about that I can't begin. I've all kinds of personal problems too ~~to~~ tell you of. One staggers on from one kind of unwellness to the next but no matter.

I must write to Mary to thank her for the card with a photo of Eric's carving of the Good Samaritan — I'd never seen it before — I see it was done in 1938 — a very late work & I thought it quite the best thing I'd seen of Eric's since the early stone-carvings. It had some of their direct feeling & great pathos & not slick as some of the middle & later ones tended to be. It is a lovely thing & I was very glad to see it. And of course improved by being bashed about a bit by old Jerry's bombs.

Well, God bless you my dear René. Thanks for writing & the script. Much love to Joan & all

Yours ever Dai

Forgive writing errors no time to read through it now.

I don't agree with this Decree of the Sacred Congregation of Rites whereby the Faithful are to be given the Sacrament on Good Friday. It seems to me insensitive to the whole shape of the mythus & altogether wrong artistically and altogether a break with something ~~[illegible]~~ about Good Friday that is found in the early centuries — Their argument is that "if the celebrant consumes the Preconsecrated Host ~~a [illegible]~~ at the "Mass" of the presanctified then it is right for the Faithful to communicate — I think that a completely wrong headed argument — I mean the celebrant silently communicating from a solitary host and the broken & stripped forms & empty tabernacle have a great rightness

whereas a general communion of the people will be quite a different matter. & something which belongs properly to Easter Day, don't you think? D